



# Historic Designation Categories

Preservation Austin exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. This document outlines the types of historic designation a building in Austin can have, as well as the protections and benefits associated with each. To learn more about historic designation and other preservation topics, visit [preservationaustin.org](http://preservationaustin.org)

## FEDERAL DESIGNATION

**The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)** is a list of the nation's important historic properties.

- Properties and districts listed in the [National Register of Historic Places](#) represent places associated with significant events or people, or that embody distinctive architecture or yield important archeological information.
- Buildings can be listed in the NRHP individually or as a part of a historic district.
- Nominations are sent to the Texas Historical Commission (THC) for a determination of eligibility, review of the nomination form, and consideration by the State Board of Review and the State Historic Preservation Officer before being forwarded to the federal level for final review and listing.
- NRHP designation is primarily honorary; no zoning change is involved, and historic review is advisory only.
- Under [federal law](#), the listing of a property in the NRHP places no restrictions on what a non-federal owner may do with their property up to and including demolition, unless the property is involved in a project that receives federal assistance.
- Austin's Historic Landmark Commission (HLC) reviews building, demolition, and relocation permits for contributing buildings in NRHP historic districts on an advisory basis and makes recommendations to city staff, the Planning Commission or the Zoning and Platting Commission, and City Council.

### Incentives available for National Register properties:

- The [Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program](#), which includes a 20 percent income tax credit for the rehabilitation of income-producing historic buildings listed in the NRHP.
- The [Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program](#), which offers a 25 percent tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic buildings listed in the NRHP. Buildings must have an income-producing or non-profit use. This can be combined with the federal credit.

## STATE DESIGNATION

**Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHL) and State Antiquities Landmarks (SAL)** are the main [state-level historic designations](#). [RTHLs](#) are properties judged by the THC to be architecturally and historically significant. [SALs](#) are designated by the THC and receive protection under the Texas Antiquities Code. [SALs](#) have legal protection. Listing in the NRHP is a prerequisite for SAL designation of a building or structure. The THC also holds preservation covenants and easements to protect significant historic properties.

### Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHLs):

- The THC awards RTHL designation to buildings at least 50 years old that are worthy of preservation for their architectural and historical significance.
- The applicant must seek review by the County Historical Association, which then submits the nomination for the applicant to be reviewed by the THC Marker Program staff. The THC Marker Program staff then make recommendations regarding which nominations are approvable for the consideration of THC Commissioners, who make the final decision on what properties become RTHLs.



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## STATE DESIGNATION (CONT'D)

- RTHL designation does not automatically guarantee listing in the NRHP or vice versa. RTHL designation is not a prerequisite for NRHP listing or vice versa.
- The THC reviews and provides a letter of expectations for proposed alterations to RTHLs, including remodeling, additions, relocation, or demolition.

### State Antiquities Landmark Designation (SALs):

- SAL designation is most common for archeological sites and historic buildings on public land, but can also provide equal protection to private property.
- SALs are designated by the THC and receive legal protection under the [Texas Antiquities Code](#).
- Listing in the NRHP is a prerequisite for SAL designation of a building or structure, but not for archeological sites.
- The land-owning agency must consult with the THC about the alteration or destruction of SAL sites or buildings through the permit process.
- SAL designation remains with the property if transferred from public to private ownership and therefore can be used to ensure the future preservation of significant historic buildings.
- Buildings designated as SALs are listed in the [Texas Historic Sites Atlas](#) database. Information about designated archeological sites is not available to the general public to protect the sites from vandalism and destruction.

### Incentives available to RTHL and SAL listed properties:

- The [Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program](#) offers a 25 percent tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic buildings listed in the NRHP or designated as RTHLs/SALs. Buildings must have an income-producing or non-profit use.
- State historic preservation grants from the [Texas Preservation Trust Fund](#).
- Ad valorem tax exemptions, if granted by local taxing authorities (**RTHL only**).
- Technical preservation guidance and assistance through the THC (**RTHL only**).

### State of Texas Preservation Covenants or Easements:

The THC holds [preservation covenants and easements](#) that protect significant historic properties. These instruments are filed in county deed records and are binding on future owners in perpetuity or for a specified duration. A covenant is generally incorporated into a property deed, while an easement is a separate land record associated with the property's deed. Such protections between the State of Texas and a property owner would guide future redevelopment in a preservation-oriented direction. A covenant or easement provides a similar level of protection as SAL designation without the lengthy designation process.



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## LOCAL DESIGNATION

The historic designation process at the local level has two main categories, Historic Landmark designation, and locally designated historic district zoning. This zoning change is the only tool that protects buildings from demolition, in addition to requiring design review for exterior alterations.

### City of Austin Historic Landmark Designation:

- Historic Landmark designation includes historic buildings, sites, cemeteries, or ruins.
- A building must be fifty years old or older, retain historic integrity, and meet two of five criteria for significance.
- Historic Landmark zoning is designated by City Council after approval by the HLC and the Planning Commission or the Zoning and Platting Commission.
- The HLC reviews and approves changes to the exterior or the site, including demolition review.

### City of Austin Historic Districts:

- Locally designated historic districts are contiguous groups of buildings, sites, and parks.
- Designation involves adding an HD to the base zoning and requires the support of a majority of property owners or land area owners, in addition to high architectural integrity.
- Applicants must follow the historic district application guide.
- Local historic district zoning is designated by City Council after approval by the HLC and the Planning Commission or the Zoning and Platting Commission.
- The HLC reviews and approves permits in locally designated historic districts for building, demolition, or relocation.
- Locally designated historic districts offer the strongest protection for older neighborhoods since the HLC maintains demolition review over these properties.

### Incentives available to locally designated properties:

- An annual tax exemption offered by the City of Austin, Travis County, and Austin Independent School District to owners of historic landmarks.
- An owner who rehabilitates a contributing property in a historic district is eligible for a City of Austin tax abatement of 100% of the City property taxes assessed on the added value that results from rehabilitation.
- Heritage grants for owners of historic properties that attract out-of-town tourists.
- Eligible to apply for a Preservation Austin bi-annual grant for education, brick-and-mortar work, and planning, surveying, and local historic designation work.

### City of Austin Historic Resource Surveys:

Historic Resource Surveys highlight potential landmarks and historic districts by identifying older buildings and areas that tell the story of an important person, community, group, or the city as a whole, or that exhibit significant architecture or landscape design. Surveys evaluate what exists on the ground through fieldwork and research. Being included in a survey does not automatically lead to historic designation for a building or neighborhood.

***Preservation Austin is indebted to staff from the Texas Historical Commission and the City of Austin for assistance in compiling this information.***